

About *Manuale Tipografico*

■ **Commentary by David Pankow** ■

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Giambattista Bodoni *Manuale Tipografico*

Parma 1818

The *Manuale Tipografico* of Giambattista Bodoni has been called the greatest type specimen book ever printed. Issued posthumously in 1818 at Parma by Bodoni's devoted widow Margherita, the two-volume work shows a dazzling array of 142 roman alphabets, each accompanied by a corresponding italic; in addition, there are many script and exotic faces, as well as an outstanding collection of flowers and ornaments, all beautifully printed on crisp, handmade paper. These types and decorative materials were the culmination of more than forty years of assiduous devotion by Bodoni to the typographic arts, both in his capacity as printer to the Duke of Parma and as proprietor of his own private press and typefoundry. Only 250 copies of the specimen book were printed, and surviving examples are now highly prized by collectors.

The true value of the *Manuale* lies not in the fact that it is a splendidly printed and rare book, or even that it summarizes the life's work of a celebrated type designer and printer who blithely sailed through some of the most tumultuous times in European history. Rather, its real significance is that from its pages speak the first successful modern types – more evolved,

refined, and logical than those of Baskerville, yet not so chillingly formal and clinical as the letterforms of Bodoni's great French rival Firmin Didot.

Though Bodoni rarely made his types available to other printers, they came to have a profound (though not always salutary) influence on type design that is felt to this day. Any appreciation and understanding of his typefaces, therefore, must begin with a study of the *Manuale Tipografico*, as well as its introductory manifesto, completed by Bodoni in the last years of his life.

Giambattista Bodoni was born on February 26, 1740, in the Piedmont region of northern Italy, the youngest of four sons. His father was a master printer, and Bodoni, like two brothers before him, chose to make a career of printing. Bodoni showed great aptitude as an apprentice in his father's shop, but as the youngest son in the family business, his prospects were fewer than ambition allowed. So at the age of eighteen, Bodoni set off for Rome with a companion. The trip was at least partly financed by the sale of engravings cut by Bodoni for printers in cities along the way.

In Rome, Bodoni found employment at the famous Sacrae Congregationis de Fide, a branch of the Vatican devoted to producing type and printing for the church's missionary publications. Though initially hired as a compositor, Bodoni was soon given a task that would dramatically influence the course of his career. Among the vast resources of the Propaganda Fide was a long-neglected and sadly jumbled collection of typesetting paraphernalia. These consisted of the punches (the steel bars on which the characters of an alphabet are cut in relief) and

the matrices (made of a softer metal, usually copper or brass, and containing sunken impressions of the characters on the punches) for a wealth of exotic typefaces. With the encouragement of the Abbot Ruggieri, more mentor than supervisor, Bodoni soon learned the rudiments of Middle Eastern and Oriental languages, and then set to sorting out the pied and rusty mess. He is said to have accomplished this daunting assignment with great brilliance. Far from instilling a loathing in the young man for the typefounding process, this long and intimate immersion in its essential elements left Bodoni with a strong desire to learn its every secret. He might have enjoyed a long and successful career in Rome had not his patron Ruggieri committed suicide in 1766. Bodoni found a sympathetic friend in the powerful Cardinal Spinelli, but when he too died shortly afterward, Bodoni decided to leave Rome.

He apparently intended to go to England, perhaps somehow to make contact with the printer and type designer John Baskerville, whose work Bodoni much admired. Barely into his journey, however, Bodoni was stricken with a bout of malaria so severe that he was forced to spend a long convalescence back home in Saluzzo. But what then may have looked like a fatal blow to his ambitions must later have seemed like a stroke of good fortune. While recuperating, Bodoni received and promptly accepted an offer from the young Don Ferdinand, Duke of Parma, to set up a ducal printing office. Fully recovered and full of energy, Bodoni arrived in Parma on February 24, 1768, two days before his twenty-eighth birthday. The books of the new Stamperia Reale would, it was hoped, rival those produced at the courts of Paris, Madrid, and Turin.

In equipping the new press, Bodoni selected the types of Pierre-Simon Fournier (or Fournier *le jeune*) then the most celebrated type designer and founder in France. Though oldstyle in lineage, Fournier's type designs had begun to break the stranglehold of the sixteenth-century Garamond model. His other accomplishments included the introduction of a typographic point-system that, for the first time, provided printers with standards of measurement, while the publication of the first two volumes of a comprehensive manual on printing and typefounding established Fournier as a respected authority. He also designed and cast a collection of ravishing ornaments and flowers which Bodoni found so irresistible that, upon being given permission by the duke to establish his own foundry, he immediately copied them (along with many of Fournier's types) with great fidelity.

The first publications of the new press appeared in 1768, and for the next few years, Bodoni followed a style that was consciously French. He designed types and ornaments in direct imitation of Fournier, was fond of lavish decoration (including the use of engraved initials and illustrations), and when given the chance, printed in extravagantly large formats. Blessed with so favorable a sinecure, some printers might eventually have sunk into superficiality and indolence. As H.V. Marrot noted in the preface to his translation of Bodoni's introduction to the 1818 *Manuale*, Bodoni "had steered his vessel into port after what might justly be termed a swift and smooth passage, there to spend the rest of his long life sailing gallantly round and round in the safety of the lagoon, sails set and flags flying, to the no small edification and applause of crowded shores."

If there is an element of the superficial in some of the titles that emanated from the ducal press, Bodoni was not to blame. In the productions from his own private press he did not claim (or deserve) any praise as a scholar. One book he printed for the English nobleman Horace Walpole was criticized by its author as "so full of faults that it is not fit to be sold here." Though Bodoni collected praise for his work with the grace of a courtier and curried favor with the crowned heads of Europe, he never let his ardent desire to be "king of typographers and typographer to kings" interfere with a sincere devotion to type and a very real hope of being judged well by future generations of readers. "No art," he declared, "has greater need than typography of keeping future generations in mind, so that its present activities may be no less useful to posterity than to our contemporaries. Perhaps there is not any class whose eagerness for posthumous fame is more useful to the Public than that of Typographers."

Bodoni's passion and energy were committed to type design; the books printed at the Stamperia Reale and later at his own private press were canvases for his typefaces. Though he always retained his fondness for a nobly proportioned folio, Bodoni gradually jettisoned ornament and illustrations from his books. By the 1790s, he achieved all his effects with type alone, sometimes spending months experimenting with layouts for a title page and even cutting new types when nothing in his cases would quite do. "In the long run," he later wrote, "Philosophy and the best literature impel a cultured taste more and more toward simplicity and restriction to essentials and toward a preference over all others for the beauty which has no

borrowed plumes...the type is the one thing which is inevitably necessary, and to it all else is subservient."

Bodoni's types might profitably be studied by an examination of the 1,500 or so books he designed and printed between 1768 and his death in 1813. A better place to begin, however, is with his three great type specimens of 1771, 1788, and 1818 (the last issued posthumously by his widow). The first, *Fregi e majuscole*, was made in frank and admiring imitation of the capital letters and ornaments (over 400!) of Fournier. However derivative and regressive – after all, Bodoni had once been inspired by the more delicate letterforms of Baskerville – this slim 76-page specimen shows Bodoni's flawless skills with the punch and graver, and his determination to follow the best contemporary models. Bodoni's own instincts begin to reveal themselves in his next important type specimen, the *Manuale* of 1788, containing 155 roman and italic types, and 29 Greek types. This stately volume includes his early Fournier-inspired types, as well as many newer ones; the latter are partly inspired by Baskerville, who had by then regained his influence over Bodoni, and showed Bodoni's emerging fascination with contrast in the structural elements of a letterform, or, as he later explained, "light and shade, which is the natural property of everything written by a well-cut and well-held pen."

In his last years, though racked by gout and beset by financial concerns, when he might have contented himself with basking in the honors bestowed on him by Europe's nobility, he chose instead to begin work on a final specimen book that would summarize a lifetime of achievement in type. He was apparently able to make the preparations for only the first vol-

ume and an introductory preface when he died in 1813 at the age of 73, the most highly regarded printer of his age. His widow, however, after much effort brought the *Manuale* to completion, issuing it in 1818. The two-volume work is a monumental achievement. Here is presented Bodoni's legacy, his final statement on type design: 142 roman typefaces and their corresponding italics, all his exotic types, and a large collection of ornaments. One of the most remarkable aspects of the *Manuale* is its integrity of style. All of the Fournier-inspired types have been purged, leaving only those that were the creation of Bodoni's mature period. Ever conscious of his contributions to the typographic arts (and with an eye on posterity), he had tinkered with his types endlessly, touching up punches or cutting new ones until each design was worthy of being printed on paper, "fixed and preserved with sharper outlines than the articulation of lips can give them."

In his preface to the *Manuale*, Bodoni enumerates four principles or qualities from which a good type derives its beauty. Regularity or uniformity of design is the first, and consists of understanding that many of the characters in an alphabet share common elements which must remain "precisely and exactly the same in them all." The second is "smartness and neatness," in other words, well-cut and finished punches that produce clean matrices from which sharp and mirror-smooth type can be cast. The third principle consists of good taste. Here the type designer must maintain "a neat simplicity" and an awareness of his (or her) debt to the best manuscript letterforms. The fourth, and final quality evident in a beautiful type, asserts Bodoni, is charm, difficult to define, but present in those

letters which give “the impression of being written not unwillingly or hastily, but painstakingly, as a labor of love.”

What of the types shown in the 1818 *Manuale*? First and foremost they are modern, exhibiting strong contrasts between the thick and thin parts of the letterforms. Unlike oldstyle types, they are vertical in stress, while the serifs show little or no bracketing where they join the stems. They are also masterfully cut, often lively, and full of individuality. Bodoni has often been charged with being a borrower – first from Fournier, then Baskerville, and finally from Didot. Indeed, the influence of all three is very much present in Bodoni’s types, but much of Bodoni is there also. The comparison to Didot especially needs clarification, since the types of Bodoni’s *Manuale* seem at first to share a strong kinship with those of his French rival. Didot’s types, however, are unrelentingly rigid, the products of mathematical reason and geometrical dogma. Where Didot’s serifs run head on into the stems of letterforms, without the slightest deviation from the horizontal, those of Bodoni are curved, sometimes only very slightly, but nonetheless revealing that Bodoni relied more on his good taste and sense of harmony than on a strict, repetitive regularity of form. In particular, many of Bodoni’s larger roman and italic sizes are full of such variety and even playfulness, that typographers who know his types only from the many bland twentieth-century interpretations in existence should find special pleasure in these exuberant originals.

Bodoni’s exotic types, shown in volume two of the *Manuale*, are in many ways quite as important as his Latin alphabets. Throughout his career, he took special pride in cutting a wide variety of Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and other foreign faces, some

of them quite obscure. Mindful, perhaps, of his training at the Propaganda Fide, Bodoni noted in his preface: “I do not therefore consider wasted the attention which I devoted to the cutting of two Coptic, two Armenian, two Phoenician, one Punic, two Palmyrene, one Cyrillic, one Illyrian, one Ulphilas’s Gothic, one Georgian, two Tibetan, one Brahman, one Malabar, two German, and various Russian founts, even though some of them are not, like ours, composed of simple constituents, and required an interminable series of matrices.”

Indeed, Bodoni’s appetite for work must have been prodigious, since he claimed that his types were all “cast in matrices from punches entirely perfected with great love by my own hand.” The enormity of his type-cutting accomplishments is best appreciated by looking at an inventory of his materials prepared in the early 1840s. Here was noted the existence of 25,491 punches and 50,283 matrices, along with various molds and printing office records. Today, these documents and type-casting artifacts are part of the Museo Bodoniano in Parma.

The typographic work of Giambattista Bodoni is not without its flaws. He was often too intent on using his types and books to make grandiloquent statements, favoring lavish margins and large formats. He had his eye more on the collector of beautiful volumes than on the scholar who demanded impeccable texts. And with unlimited access to freshly cast, sharp type, he printed to a standard that no workaday printer could hope to emulate, leading later founders to cast coarsened imitations of Bodoni’s types; though these versions held up better, they lacked the appealing delicacy of the originals. Still, there is much to admire in Bodoni’s contributions to the art of typography. He respond-

ed brilliantly to every stimulus and influence that came his way during a long life, and exercised a genius for making beautiful books. He called attention to the need for employing the very best materials for bookmaking, including fine white papers and dense, black inks.

Finally, he showed that a departure from the oldstyle, humanist model in type design did not necessarily lead to sterility. Indeed, Bodoni's types were wholly and enthusiastically modern, never heartless or devoid of spirit.

David Pankow

David Pankow is the curator of the Melbert B. Cary, Jr. Graphic Arts Collection at Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York. The Cary Collection is one of the country's premier rare book libraries on the history and practice of printing and also includes holdings on papermaking, bookbinding, typefounding, and the art of the book. He is a professor in the graduate program of RIT's School of Printing and teaches courses on the history of the book and on the history and technology of twentieth-century fine printing. He has also written and lectured extensively, including articles on "Type" and "Printing" for *American Academic Encyclopedia*, and is currently the editor of *Printing History*, the scholarly journal published by the American Printing History Association. He is the author of *Tempting the Palette: A Survey of Color Printing Processes* and is the editor of *American Proprietary Types*, a collection of essays to be published by APHA in 1998.

Manuale Tipografico Binding

The two volumes of *Manuale Tipografico* are bound with quarter green leather and marbled-paper-covered pasteboards, measuring 13 1/8 by 9 inches (332 x 229 mm). The front and back boards are covered with green and blue shell-patterned marbled paper. The spine is smooth and divided into six panels with heavy, double rules gold-tooled with a flower pattern alternating between the tops and bottoms of the rule edges. Gilt titling in the second panel.

The two volumes are housed in quarter calf with brown and orange German marbled-paper-covered slipcases. The leather spine is divided by raised bands decorated with a gold-tooled saltire pattern into five panels. The bottom panel has gilt armorial of the Rocca-Saporiti family. Gold titling in second panel; blind-stamped swirl decoration in other panels.

Collation Volume I: 2⁰: π^2 , 2 π^4 (+2 π^5) a-b⁴, c⁶, ²a-i⁴, χ^2 , 1-65⁴, 66⁶ [\$2 signed], 325 leaves, pp. [14] I-XXVIII, ²i-LXXII, [4], ff. 1-265, pp. 266-267.

Volume II: 2⁰: π^2 , 1-68⁴, χ^2 [\$2 signed]; 276 leaves, ff. [2] [1] 2-272 (3 inserted plates numbered ff. 273-275), pp. 276-279.

Contents: Volume I: Inset: engraved portrait of Bodoni. π^1 : half title (verso blank). π^2 : title page (verso blank). 2 π^1 : dedication (verso blank). 2 π^2 ^a-2 π^4 ^b: 'MAESTA'. 2 π^5 ^a: 'DISCORSO | DELLA | VEDOVA | E | PREFAZIONE | DEL CAVALIERE | BODONI. a1^a-c6^a: 'LA VEDOVA BODONI | AL LETTORE.' (text pp. I-XXVII). c6^b: blank. ²a1^a-²i4^b: 'GIAMBATTISTA BODONI | A CHI LEGGE' (text pp. I-LXXII). χ^1 ^a: 'MANUALE | TIPOGRAFICO' (verso blank). χ^2 ^a: 'SERIE | DI | CARAT-

TERI LATINI | TONDI E CORSIVI.' 1 1^a - 66 5^a: typographic samples (versos blank). 66 6^{a-b}: 'INDICE'.

Volume II: π 1: half title (verso blank). π 2: title page (verso blank). 1 1^a - 5 3^b: 'SERIE | DI | CARATTERI GRECI, | ED | ALTRI ESOTICI.' 5 4^a - 16 2^b: 'SERIE | DI | MAJUSCOLE GRECHE | TONDE E CORSIVE'. 16 3^a - 25 1^b: 'ALTRI ESOTICI'. 25 2^a - 46 2^b: 'CARATTERI | TEDESCHI, E RUSSI | TONDI E CORSIVI, | E | LORO MAJUSCOLE'. 46 3^a - 68 4^b: 'SERIE | DE' | FREGI, | DE' SEGNI D'ALGEBRA | CHIMICA ED ASTRONOMIA, | DELLE NOTE MUSICALI, | E DI ALTRI OFFETTI.' Inserts: 3 full folio plates of musical notation. χ 1^a - χ 2^b: 'INDICE'.

Provenance This copy of Bodoni's *Manuale Tipografico* (1818) forms part of Bridwell Library's remarkable collection of books printed by Bodoni. The greater part of the collection was assembled by the Rocca-Saporiti family of Reggio, a mere 15 miles from Bodoni's Parma in northern Italy. Each volume was uniformly bound over the years, with the family arms embossed on the leather spine of the slipcase. On the family arms (reproduced here), the Rocca arms occupy heraldic quarters 1 and 4 (NW and SE with reference to the convention of cartography); the Saporiti arms are in quarters 2 and 3 (NE and SW).



The family collection was sold in 1935, near the apogee of what might be called the "industrial era" of enthusiasm for the products of Bodoni's press. This enthusiasm had a peculiar flavor, no longer easily recaptured, that owed something to bibliophily, but perhaps more to Mussolini. In the years between the first centenary of Bodoni's death in 1913 and the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of his birth in 1940, Bodoni was increasingly revered not merely for his fine taste as a designer but for his achievements as a typefounding captain of industry

of whom it might have been nice to think that “he made the presses run on time.”

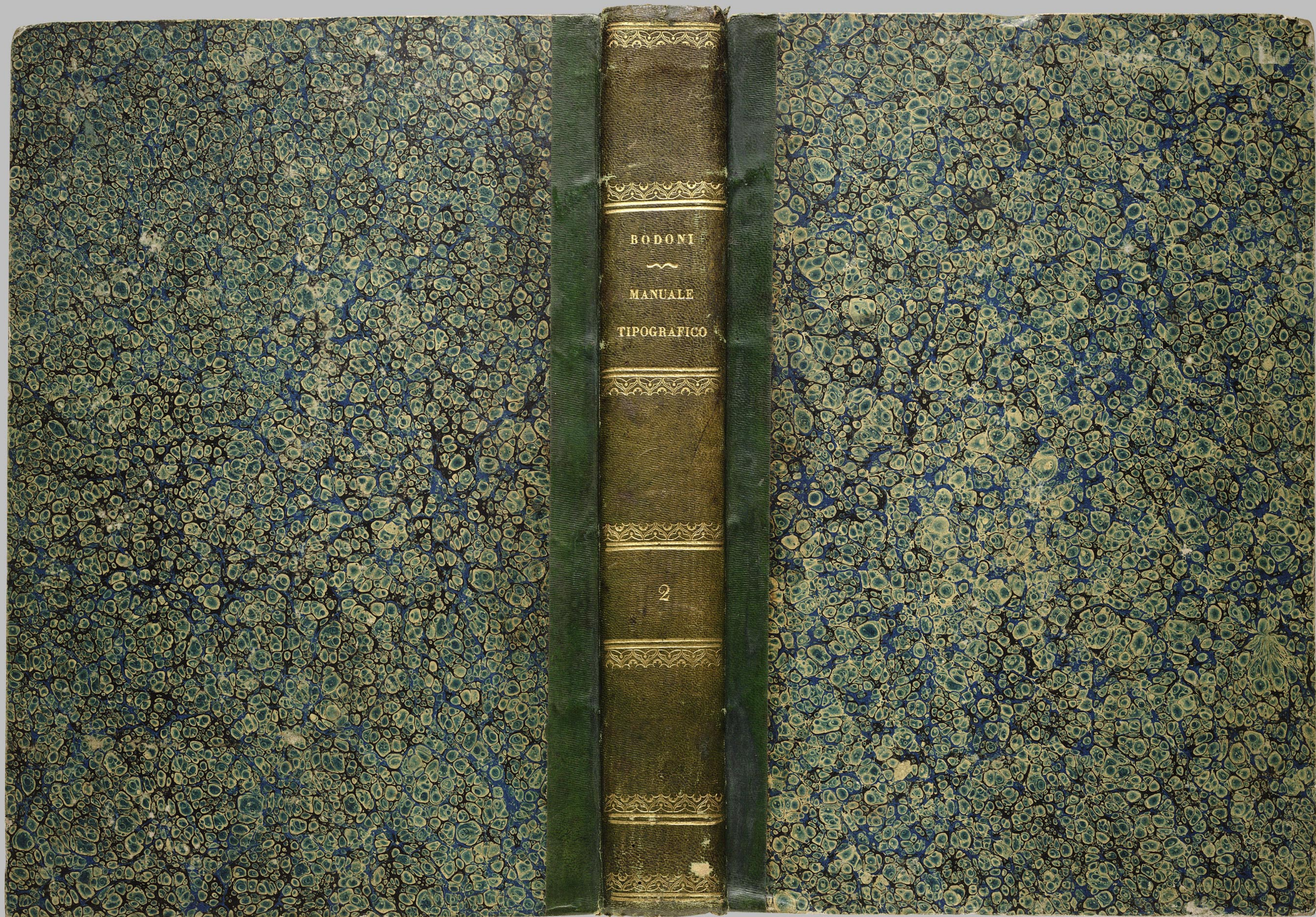
In that era it was still possible for collectors to assemble comprehensive collections and for booksellers to issue special Bodoni catalogues. Rudolf Geering of Basel offered in his Bodoni catalogue (No. 398) in 1922 a collection of some 300 titles. Weiss and Company of Munich published a folio catalogue (No. II) listing some 500 different publications of Bodoni in 1926, and Menno Hertzberger of Amsterdam issued a smaller catalogue in 1932. This active trade, with full scholarly documentation, was centered (as bibliopolic activity so often is) around a bibliography. H.C. Brooks' *Compendiosa Bibliografia di Edizioni Bodoniane* was published in Florence in 1927; it is still the standard work.

The purchaser of the Rocca-Saporiti collection was the wealthy Italian textile industrialist and philanthropist Giovanni Treccani (1877-1961), founder and patron of that superb instrument of scholarship, the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1929-1939), the most enduring intellectual achievement of Fascist Italy, still published by his institute (with a steady flow of supplements) and still popularly known as the “Treccani.” He was made a hereditary count in 1937 and in the following year permitted to add “degli Alfieri” to the title, as shown on the bookplate. The eagle stands on a rock inscribed with the initial letters of the encyclopedia and of Treccani himself.

Treccani collected books, often with worthy repositories in mind. He bought, for instance, in 1923 against strong transatlantic competition, the magnificent fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript bible of Borso d'Este and gave it to the library in



Modena, seat of the Este family; his valuable collection of books by Manzoni went to the Centro di Studi manzoniani. He retained the Bodoni collection, however, adding to it until it included 419 editions. It was sold after his death through the Milanese bookseller Carlo Alberto Chiesa to Bridwell Library in 1974.





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—
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VOL. I



G. BODONI
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